Chapter XXVI - A Burial

From this date my life did not want variety; I went out a good deal, with the entire consent of Madame Beck, who perfectly approved the grade of my acquaintance. That worthy directress had never from the first treated me otherwise than with respect; and when she found that I was liable to frequent invitations from a chateau and a great hotel, respect improved into distinction.

Not that she was fulsome about it: Madame, in all things worldly, was in nothing weak; there was measure and sense in her hottest pursuit of self-interest, calm and considerateness in her closest clutch of gain; without, then, laying herself open to my contempt as a time-server and a toadie, she marked with tact that she was pleased people connected with her establishment should frequent such associates as must cultivate and elevate, rather than those who might deteriorate and depress. She never praised either me or my friends; only once when she was sitting in the sun in the garden, a cup of coffee at her elbow and the Gazette in her hand, looking very comfortable, and I came up and asked leave of absence for the evening, she delivered herself in this gracious sort: -

'Oui, oui, ma bonne amie: je vous donne la permission de coeur et de gre. Votre travail dans ma maison a toujours ete admirable, rempli de zele et de discretion: vous avez bien le droit de vous amuser. Sortez donc tant que vous voudrez. Quant a votre choix de connaissances, j'en suis contente; c'est sage, digne, laudable.'

She closed her lips and resumed the Gazette.

The reader will not too gravely regard the little circumstance that about this time the triply-enclosed packet of five letters temporarily disappeared from my bureau. Blank dismay was naturally my first sensation on making the discovery; but in a moment I took heart of grace.

'Patience!' whispered I to myself. 'Let me say nothing, but wait peaceably; they will come back again.'

And they did come back: they had only been on a short visit to Madame's chamber; having passed their examination, they came back duly and truly: I found them all right the next day.

I wonder what she thought of my correspondence? What estimate did she form of Dr. John Bretton's epistolary powers? In what light did the often very pithy thoughts, the generally sound, and sometimes original opinions, set, without pretension, in an easily-flowing, spirited style, appear to her? How did she like that genial, half humorous vein,

which to me gave such delight? What did she think of the few kind words scattered here and there-not thickly, as the diamonds were scattered in the valley of Sindbad, but sparely, as those gems lie in unfabled beds? Oh, Madame Beck! how seemed these things to you?

I think in Madame Beck's eyes the five letters found a certain favour. One day after she had *borrowed* them of me (in speaking of so suave a little woman, one ought to use suave terms), I caught her examining me with a steady contemplative gaze, a little puzzled, but not at all malevolent. It was during that brief space between lessons, when the pupils turned out into the court for a quarter of an hour's recreation; she and I remained in the first classe alone: when I met her eye, her thoughts forced themselves partially through her lips.

'Il y a,' said she, 'quelquechose de bien remarquable dans le caractere Anglais.'

'How, Madame?'

She gave a little laugh, repeating the word 'how' in English.

'Je ne saurais vous dire 'how;' mais, enfin, les Anglais ont des idees a eux, en amitie, en amour, en tout. Mais au moins il n'est pas besoin de les surveiller,' she added, getting up and trotting away like the compact little pony she was.

'Then I hope,' murmured I to myself, 'you will graciously let alone my letters for the future.'

Alas! something came rushing into my eyes, dimming utterly their vision, blotting from sight the schoolroom, the garden, the bright winter sun, as I remembered that never more would letters, such as she had read, come to me. I had seen the last of them. That goodly river on whose banks I had sojourned, of whose waves a few reviving drops had trickled to my lips, was bending to another course: it was leaving my little hut and field forlorn and sand-dry, pouring its wealth of waters far away. The change was right, just, natural; not a word could be said: but I loved my Rhine, my Nile; I had almost worshipped my Ganges, and I grieved that the grand tide should roll estranged, should vanish like a false mirage. Though stoical, I was not quite a stoic; drops streamed fast on my hands, on my desk: I wept one sultry shower, heavy and brief.

But soon I said to myself, 'The Hope I am bemoaning suffered and made me suffer much: it did not die till it was full time: following an agony so lingering, death ought to be welcome.'

Welcome I endeavoured to make it. Indeed, long pain had made patience a habit. In the end I closed the eyes of my dead, covered its face, and composed its limbs with great calm.

The letters, however, must be put away, out of sight: people who have undergone bereavement always jealously gather together and lock away mementos: it is not supportable to be stabbed to the heart each moment by sharp revival of regret.

One vacant holiday afternoon (the Thursday) going to my treasure, with intent to consider its final disposal, I perceived - and this time with a strong impulse of displeasure - that it had been again tampered with: the packet was there, indeed, but the ribbon which secured it had been untied and retied; and by other symptoms I knew that my drawer had been visited.

This was a little too much. Madame Beck herself was the soul of discretion, besides having as strong a brain and sound a judgment as ever furnished a human head; that she should know the contents of my casket, was not pleasant, but might be borne. Little Jesuit inquisitress as she was, she could see things in a true light, and understand them in an unperverted sense; but the idea that she had ventured to communicate information, thus gained, to others; that she had, perhaps, amused herself with a companion over documents, in my eyes most sacred, shocked me cruelly. Yet, that such was the case I now saw reason to fear; I even guessed her confidant. Her kinsman, M. Paul Emanuel, had spent yesterday evening with her: she was much in the habit of consulting him, and of discussing with him matters she broached to no one else. This very morning, in class, that gentleman had favoured me with a glance which he seemed to have borrowed from Vashti, the actress; I had not at the moment comprehended that blue, yet lurid, flash out of his angry eye; but I read its meaning now. *He*, I believed, was not apt to regard what concerned me from a fair point of view, nor to judge me with tolerance and candour: I had always found him severe and suspicious: the thought that these letters, mere friendly letters as they were, had fallen once, and might fall again, into his hands, jarred my very soul.

What should I do to prevent this? In what corner of this strange house was it possible to find security or secresy? Where could a key be a safeguard, or a padlock a barrier?

In the grenier? No, I did not like the grenier. Besides, most of the boxes and drawers there were mouldering, and did not lock. Rats, too, gnawed their way through the decayed wood; and mice made nests amongst the litter of their contents: my dear letters (most dear still, though Ichabod was written on their covers) might be consumed by

vermin; certainly the writing would soon become obliterated by damp. No; the grenier would not do - but where then?

While pondering this problem, I sat in the dormitory window-seat. It was a fine frosty afternoon; the winter sun, already setting, gleamed pale on the tops of the garden-shrubs in the 'allee defendue.' One great old pear-tree - the nun's pear-tree - stood up a tall dryad skeleton, grey, gaunt, and stripped. A thought struck me - one of those queer fantastic thoughts that will sometimes strike solitary people. I put on my bonnet, cloak, and furs, and went out into the city.

Bending my steps to the old historical quarter of the town, whose hoax and overshadowed precincts I always sought by instinct in melancholy moods, I wandered on from street to street, till, having crossed a half deserted 'place' or square, I found myself before a sort of broker's shop; an ancient place, full of ancient things. What I wanted was a metal box which might be soldered, or a thick glass jar or bottle which might be stoppered or sealed hermetically. Amongst miscellaneous heaps, I found and purchased the latter article.

I then made a little roll of my letters, wrapped them in oiled silk, bound them with twine, and, having put them in the bottle, got the old Jew broker to stopper, seal, and make it air-tight. While obeying my directions, he glanced at me now and then suspiciously from under his frost-white eyelashes. I believe he thought there was some evil deed on hand. In all this I had a dreary something - not pleasure - but a sad, lonely satisfaction. The impulse under which I acted, the mood controlling me, were similar to the impulse and the mood which had induced me to visit the confessional. With quick walking I regained the pensionnat just at dark, and in time for dinner.

At seven o'clock the moon rose. At half-past seven, when the pupils and teachers were at study, and Madame Beck was with her mother and children in the salle-a-manger, when the half-boarders were all gone home, and Rosine had left the vestibule, and all was still - I shawled myself, and, taking the sealed jar, stole out through the first-classe door, into the berceau and thence into the 'allee defendue.'

Methusaleh, the pear-tree, stood at the further end of this walk, near my seat: he rose up, dim and gray, above the lower shrubs round him. Now Methusaleh, though so very old, was of sound timber still; only there was a hole, or rather a deep hollow, near his root. I knew there was such a hollow, hidden partly by ivy and creepers growing thick round; and there I meditated hiding my treasure. But I was not only going to hide a treasure - I meant also to bury a grief. That grief over which I had lately been weeping, as I wrapped it in its winding- sheet, must be interred.

Well, I cleared away the ivy, and found the hole; it was large enough to receive the jar, and I thrust it deep in. In a tool-shed at the bottom of the garden, lay the relics of building-materials, left by masons lately employed to repair a part of the premises. I fetched thence a slate and some mortar, put the slate on the hollow, secured it with cement, covered the hole with black mould, and, finally, replaced the ivy. This done, I rested, leaning against the tree; lingering, like any other mourner, beside a newly-sodded grave.

The air of the night was very still, but dim with a peculiar mist, which changed the moonlight into a luminous haze. In this air, or this mist, there was some quality - electrical, perhaps - which acted in strange sort upon me. I felt then as I had felt a year ago in England - on a night when the aurora borealis was streaming and sweeping round heaven, when, belated in lonely fields, I had paused to watch that mustering of an army with banners - that quivering of serried lances - that swift ascent of messengers from below the north star to the dark, high keystone of heaven's arch. I felt, not happy, far otherwise, but strong with reinforced strength.

If life be a war, it seemed my destiny to conduct it single-handed. I pondered now how to break up my winter-quarters - to leave an encampment where food and forage failed. Perhaps, to effect this change, another pitched battle must be fought with fortune; if so, I had a mind to the encounter: too poor to lose, God might destine me to gain. But what road was open? - what plan available?

On this question I was still pausing, when the moon, so dim hitherto, seemed to shine out somewhat brighter: a ray gleamed even white before me, and a shadow became distinct and marked. I looked more narrowly, to make out the cause of this well-defined contrast appearing a little suddenly in the obscure alley: whiter and blacker it grew on my eye: it took shape with instantaneous transformation. I stood about three yards from a tall, sable-robed, snowy-veiled woman.

Five minutes passed. I neither fled nor shrieked. She was there still. I spoke.

‘Who are you? and why do you come to me?’

She stood mute. She had no face - no features: all below her brow was masked with a white cloth; but she had eyes, and they viewed me.

I felt, if not brave, yet a little desperate; and desperation will often suffice to fill the post and do the work of courage. I advanced one step. I stretched out my hand, for I meant to touch her. She seemed to recede. I drew nearer: her recession, still silent, became swift. A mass of shrubs, full-leaved evergreens, laurel and dense yew, intervened

between me and what I followed. Having passed that obstacle, I looked and saw nothing. I waited. I said, - 'If you have any errand to men, come back and deliver it.' Nothing spoke or re-appeared.

This time there was no Dr. John to whom to have recourse: there was no one to whom I dared whisper the words, 'I have again seen the nun.'

* * * * *

Paulina Mary sought my frequent presence in the Rue Crecy. In the old Bretton days, though she had never professed herself fond of me, my society had soon become to her a sort of unconscious necessary. I used to notice that if I withdrew to my room, she would speedily come trotting after me, and opening the door and peeping in, say, with her little peremptory accent, - 'Come down. Why do you sit here by yourself? You must come into the parlour.'

In the same spirit she urged me now - 'Leave the Rue Fossette,' she said, 'and come and live with us. Papa would give you far more than Madame Beck gives you.'

Mr Home himself offered me a handsome sum - thrice my present salary - if I would accept the office of companion to his daughter. I declined. I think I should have declined had I been poorer than I was, and with scantier fund of resource, more stinted narrowness of future prospect. I had not that vocation. I could teach; I could give lessons; but to be either a private governess or a companion was unnatural to me. Rather than fill the former post in any great house, I would deliberately have taken a housemaid's place, bought a strong pair of gloves, swept bedrooms and staircases, and cleaned stoves and locks, in peace and independence. Rather than be a companion, I would have made shirts and starved.

I was no bright lady's shadow - not Miss de Bassompierre's. Overcast enough it was my nature often to be; of a subdued habit I was: but the dimness and depression must both be voluntary - such as kept me docile at my desk, in the midst of my now well-accustomed pupils in Madame Beck's fist classe; or alone, at my own bedside, in her dormitory, or in the alley and seat which were called mine, in her garden: my qualifications were not convertible, nor adaptable; they could not be made the foil of any gem, the adjunct of any beauty, the appendage of any greatness in Christendom. Madame Beck and I, without assimilating, understood each other well. I was not *her* companion, nor her children's governess; she left me free: she tied me to nothing - not to herself - not even to her interests: once, when she had for a fortnight been called from home by a near relation's illness, and on her return, all anxious and full of care about her

establishment, lest something in her absence should have gone wrong finding that matters had proceeded much as usual, and that there was no evidence of glaring neglect - she made each of the teachers a present, in acknowledgment of steadiness. To my bedside she came at twelve o'clock at night, and told me she had no present for me: 'I must make fidelity advantageous to the St. Pierre,' said she; 'if I attempt to make it advantageous to you, there will arise misunderstanding between us - perhaps separation. One thing, however, I *can* do to please you - leave you alone with your liberty: c'est-ce que je ferai.' She kept her word. Every slight shackle she had ever laid on me, she, from that time, with quiet hand removed. Thus I had pleasure in voluntarily respecting her rules: gratification in devoting double time, in taking double pains with the pupils she committed to my charge.

As to Mary de Bassompierre, I visited her with pleasure, though I would not live with her. My visits soon taught me that it was unlikely even my occasional and voluntary society would long be indispensable to her. M. de Bassompierre, for his part, seemed impervious to this conjecture, blind to this possibility; unconscious as any child to the signs, the likelihoods, the fitful beginnings of what, when it drew to an end, he might not approve.

Whether or not he would cordially approve, I used to speculate. Difficult to say. He was much taken up with scientific interests; keen, intent, and somewhat oppugnant in what concerned his favourite pursuits, but unsuspicious and trustful in the ordinary affairs of life. From all I could gather, he seemed to regard his 'daughterling' as still but a child, and probably had not yet admitted the notion that others might look on her in a different light: he would speak of what should be done when 'Polly' was a woman, when she should be grown up; and 'Polly,' standing beside his chair, would sometimes smile and take his honoured head between her little hands, and kiss his iron- grey locks; and, at other times, she would pout and toss her curls: but she never said, 'Papa, I *am* grown up.'

She had different moods for different people. With her father she really was still a child, or child-like, affectionate, merry, and playful. With me she was serious, and as womanly as thought and feeling could make her. With Mrs Bretton she was docile and reliant, but not expansive. With Graham she was shy, at present very shy; at moments she tried to be cold; on occasion she endeavoured to shun him. His step made her start; his entrance hushed her; when he spoke, her answers failed of fluency; when he took leave, she remained self-vexed and disconcerted. Even her father noticed this demeanour in her.

'My little Polly,' he said once, 'you live too retired a life; if you grow to be a woman with these shy manners, you will hardly be fitted for

society. You really make quite a stranger of Dr. Bretton: how is this? Don't you remember that, as a little girl, you used to be rather partial to him?'

'*Rather*, papa,' echoed she, with her slightly dry, yet gentle and simple tone.

'And you don't like him now? What has he done?'

'Nothing. Y - e - s, I like him a little; but we are grown strange to each other.'

'Then rub it off, Polly; rub the rust and the strangeness off. Talk away when he is here, and have no fear of him?'

'*He* does not talk much. Is he afraid of me, do you think, papa?'

'Oh, to be sure, what man would not be afraid of such a little silent lady?'

'Then tell him some day not to mind my being silent. Say that it is my way, and that I have no unfriendly intention.'

'Your way, you little chatter-box? So far from being your way, it is only your whim!'

'Well, I'll improve, papa.'

And very pretty was the grace with which, the next day, she tried to keep her word. I saw her make the effort to converse affably with Dr. John on general topics. The attention called into her guest's face a pleasurable glow; he met her with caution, and replied to her in his softest tones, as if there was a kind of gossamer happiness hanging in the air which he feared to disturb by drawing too deep a breath. Certainly, in her timid yet earnest advance to friendship, it could not be denied that there was a most exquisite and fairy charm.

When the Doctor was gone, she approached her father's chair.

'Did I keep my word, papa? Did I behave better?'

'My Polly behaved like a queen. I shall become quite proud of her if this improvement continues. By-and-by we shall see her receiving my guests with quite a calm, grand manner. Miss Lucy and I will have to look about us, and polish up all our best airs and graces lest we should be thrown into the shade. Still, Polly, there is a little flutter, a little tendency to stammer now and then, and even, to lisp as you lisped when you were six years old.'

'No, papa,' interrupted she indignantly, 'that can't be true.'

'I appeal to Miss Lucy. Did she not, in answering Dr. Bretton's question as to whether she had ever seen the palace of the Prince of Bois l'Etang, say, 'yeth,' she had been there 'theveral' times?'

'Papa, you are satirical, you are mechant! I can pronounce all the letters of the alphabet as clearly as you can. But tell me this you are very particular in making me be civil to Dr. Bretton, do you like him yourself?'

'To be sure: for old acquaintance sake I like him: then he is a very good son to his mother; besides being a kind-hearted fellow and clever in his profession: yes, the callant is well enough.'

'*Callant*! Ah, Scotchman! Papa, is it the Edinburgh or the Aberdeen accent you have?'

'Both, my pet, both: and doubtless the Glaswegian into the bargain. It is that which enables me to speak French so well: a gude Scots tongue always succeeds well at the French.'

'*The* French! Scotch again: incorrigible papa. You, too, need schooling.'

'Well, Polly, you must persuade Miss Snowe to undertake both you and me; to make you steady and womanly, and me refined and classical.'

The light in which M. de Bassompierre evidently regarded 'Miss Snowe,' used to occasion me much inward edification. What contradictory attributes of character we sometimes find ascribed to us, according to the eye with which we are viewed! Madame Beck esteemed me learned and blue; Miss Fanshawe, caustic, ironic, and cynical; Mr Home, a model teacher, the essence of the sedate and discreet: somewhat conventional, perhaps, too strict, limited, and scrupulous, but still the pink and pattern of governess-correctness; whilst another person, Professor Paul Emanuel, to wit, never lost an opportunity of intimating his opinion that mine was rather a fiery and rash nature - adventurous, indocile, and audacious. I smiled at them all. If any one knew me it was little Paulina Mary.

As I would not be Paulina's nominal and paid companion, genial and harmonious as I began to find her intercourse, she persuaded me to join her in some study, as a regular and settled means of sustaining communication: she proposed the German language, which, like myself, she found difficult of mastery. We agreed to take our lessons in the Rue Crecy of the same mistress; this arrangement threw us together for some hours of every week. M. de Bassompierre seemed

quite pleased: it perfectly met his approbation, that Madame Minerva Gravity should associate a portion of her leisure with that of his fair and dear child.

That other self-elected judge of mine, the professor in the Rue Fossette, discovering by some surreptitious spying means, that I was no longer so stationary as hitherto, but went out regularly at certain hours of certain days, took it upon himself to place me under surveillance. People said M. Emanuel had been brought up amongst Jesuits. I should more readily have accredited this report had his manoeuvres been better masked. As it was, I doubted it. Never was a more undisguised schemer, a franker, looser intriguer. He would analyze his own machinations: elaborately contrive plots, and forthwith indulge in explanatory boasts of their skill. I know not whether I was more amused or provoked, by his stepping up to me one morning and whispering solemnly that he 'had his eye on me: *he* at least would discharge the duty of a friend, and not leave me entirely to my own devices. My, proceedings seemed at present very unsettled: he did not know what to make of them: he thought his cousin Beck very much to blame in suffering this sort of fluttering inconsistency in a teacher attached to her house. What had a person devoted to a serious calling, that of education, to do with Counts and Countesses, hotels and chateaux? To him, I seemed altogether 'en l'air.' On his faith, he believed I went out six days in the seven.'

I said, 'Monsieur exaggerated. I certainly had enjoyed the advantage of a little change lately, but not before it had become necessary; and the privilege was by no means exercised in excess.'

'Necessary! How was it necessary? I was well enough, he supposed? Change necessary! He would recommend me to look at the Catholic 'religieuses,' and study *their* lives. *They* asked no change.'

I am no judge of what expression crossed my face when he thus spoke, but it was one which provoked him: he accused me of being reckless, worldly, and epicurean; ambitious of greatness, and feverishly athirst for the pomps and vanities of life. It seems I had no 'devouement,' no 'recueillement' in my character; no spirit of grace, faith, sacrifice, or self-abasement. Feeling the inutility of answering these charges, I mutely continued the correction of a pile of English exercises.

'He could see in me nothing Christian: like many other Protestants, I revelled in the pride and self-will of paganism.'

I slightly turned from him, nestling still closer under the wing of silence.

A vague sound grumbled between his teeth; it could not surely be a 'juron:' he was too religious for that; but I am certain I heard the word *sacre*. Grievous to relate, the same word was repeated, with the unequivocal addition of *mille* something, when I passed him about two hours afterwards in the corridor, prepared to go and take my German lesson in the Rue Crecy. Never was a better little man, in some points, than M. Paul: never, in others, a more waspish little despot.

* * * * *

Our German mistress, Fraeulein Anna Braun, was a worthy, hearty woman, of about forty-five; she ought, perhaps, to have lived in the days of Queen Elizabeth, as she habitually consumed, for her first and second breakfasts, beer and beef: also, her direct and downright Deutsch nature seemed to suffer a sensation of cruel restraint from what she called our English reserve; though we thought we were very cordial with her: but we did not slap her on the shoulder, and if we consented to kiss her cheek, it was done quietly, and without any explosive smack. These omissions oppressed and depressed her considerably; still, on the whole, we got on very well. Accustomed to instruct foreign girls, who hardly ever will think and study for themselves - who have no idea of grappling with a difficulty, and overcoming it by dint of reflection or application - our progress, which in truth was very leisurely, seemed to astound her. In her eyes, we were a pair of glacial prodigies, cold, proud, and preternatural.

The young Countess *was* a little proud, a little fastidious: and perhaps, with her native delicacy and beauty, she had a right to these feelings; but I think it was a total mistake to ascribe them to me. I never evaded the morning salute, which Paulina would slip when she could; nor was a certain little manner of still disdain a weapon known in my armoury of defence; whereas, Paulina always kept it clear, fine, and bright, and any rough German sally called forth at once its steelly glisten.

Honest Anna Braun, in some measure, felt this difference; and while she half-feared, half-worshipped Paulina, as a sort of dainty nymph - an Undine - she took refuge with me, as a being all mortal, and of easier mood.

A book we liked well to read and translate was Schiller's Ballads; Paulina soon learned to read them beautifully; the Fraeulein would listen to her with a broad smile of pleasure, and say her voice sounded like music. She translated them, too, with a facile flow of language, and in a strain of kindred and poetic fervour: her cheek would flush, her lips tremblingly smile, her beauteous eyes kindle or melt as she went on. She learnt the best by heart, and would often recite them when we were alone together. One she liked well was 'Des Maedchens

Klage:' that is, she liked well to repeat the words, she found plaintive melody in the sound; the sense she would criticise. She murmured, as we sat over the fire one evening: -

Du Heilige, rufe dein Kind zurueck, Ich habe genossen das irdische Glueck, Ich habe gelebt und geliebet!

'Lived and loved!' said she, 'is that the summit of earthly happiness, the end of life - to love? I don't think it is. It may be the extreme of mortal misery, it may be sheer waste of time, and fruitless torture of feeling. If Schiller had said to *be* loved, he might have come nearer the truth. Is not that another thing, Lucy, to be loved?' 'I suppose it may be: but why consider the subject? What is love to you? What do you know about it?'

She crimsoned, half in irritation, half in shame.

'Now, Lucy,' she said, 'I won't take that from you. It may be well for papa to look on me as a baby: I rather prefer that he should thus view me; but *you* know and shall learn to acknowledge that I am verging on my nineteenth year.'

'No matter if it were your twenty-ninth; we will anticipate no feelings by discussion and conversation; we will not talk about love.'

'Indeed, indeed!' said she - all in hurry and heat - 'you may think to check and hold me in, as much as you please; but I *have* talked about it, and heard about it too; and a great deal and lately, and disagreeably and detrimentally: and in a way you wouldn't approve.'

And the vexed, triumphant, pretty, naughty being laughed. I could not discern what she meant, and I would not ask her: I was nonplussed. Seeing, however, the utmost innocence in her countenance - combined with some transient perverseness and petulance - I said at last, -

'Who talks to you disagreeably and detrimentally on such matters? Who that has near access to you would dare to do it?'

'Lucy,' replied she more softly, 'it is a person who makes me miserable sometimes; and I wish she would keep away - I don't want her.'

'But who, Paulina, can it be? You puzzle me much.'

'It is - it is my cousin Ginevra. Every time she has leave to visit Mrs Cholmondeley she calls here, and whenever she finds me alone she begins to talk about her admirers. Love, indeed! You should hear all she has to say about love.'

‘Oh, I have heard it,’ said I, quite coolly; ‘and on the whole, perhaps it is as well you should have heard it too: it is not to be regretted, it is all right. Yet, surely, Ginevra's mind cannot influence yours. You can look over both her head and her heart.’

‘She does influence me very much. She has the art of disturbing my happiness and unsettling my opinions. She hurts me through the feelings and people dearest to me.’

‘What does she say, Paulina? Give me some idea. There may be counteraction of the damage done.’

‘The people I have longest and most esteemed are degraded by her. She does not spare Mrs Bretton - she does not spare.... Graham.’

‘No, I daresay: and how does she mix up these with her sentiment and her....*love*? She does mix them, I suppose?’

‘Lucy, she is insolent; and, I believe, false. You know Dr. Bretton. We both know him. He may be careless and proud; but when was he ever mean or slavish? Day after day she shows him to me kneeling at her feet, pursuing her like her shadow. She - repulsing him with insult, and he imploring her with infatuation. Lucy, is it true? Is any of it true?’

‘It may be true that he once thought her handsome: does she give him out as still her suitor?’

‘She says she might marry him any day: he only waits her consent.’

‘It is these tales which have caused that reserve in your manner towards Graham which your father noticed.’

‘They have certainly made me all doubtful about his character. As Ginevra speaks, they do not carry with them the sound of unmixed truth: I believe she exaggerates - perhaps invents - but I want to know how far.’

‘Suppose we bring Miss Fanshawe to some proof. Give her an opportunity of displaying the power she boasts.’

‘I could do that to-morrow. Papa has asked some gentlemen to dinner, all savants. Graham, who, papa is beginning to discover, is a savant, too - skilled, they say, in more than one branch of science - is among the number. Now I should be miserable to sit at table unsupported, amidst such a party. I could not talk to Messieurs A - - and Z - - , the Parisian Academicians: all my new credit for manner would be put

in peril. You and Mrs Bretton must come for my sake; Ginevra, at a word, will join you.'

'Yes; then I will carry a message of invitation, and she shall have the chance of justifying her character for veracity.'